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DDI-35203

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

2 July 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Yemen Revolution: Disengagement or Continued Conflict?

SUMMARY

A. The conflict in Yemen is stalemated, with republican and UAR forces in control of most of the country but unable to subdue the royalists in the north and northeast. We see little likelihood of an early break in the military impasse.

B. When Nasser agreed to "disengage," he probably assumed that he would be able to fulfill his undertaking without jeopardizing Sallal's government. However, the republicans are not yet firmly established, and Nasser is aware that he cannot substantially reduce UAR military strength in Yemen without sacrificing the republican regime, something he is clearly unwilling to do.

C. The UN presence may impose some restraints on the parties involved long enough for disengagement to move ahead, albeit slowly.

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D. If the conflict continues, the Soviet presence in Yemen is likely to expand, since the republican forces will be inclined to accept assistance from any source.

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1. Nine months after the army revolt which followed the death of Imam Ahmed, Yemen is still caught up in a bloody conflict. In the early stages, Prime Minister Sallal's Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) succeeded in extending its control over most of the country, aided by large-scale military support from the United Arab Republic (UAR). More recently, little progress has been made in subduing the tribally-based royalists, despite the presence of about 30,000 UAR troops. Moreover, the republican regime has shown increasing internal weaknesses, and Nasser and Sallal plainly fear that any substantial reduction of UAR strength would risk a republican collapse.

The Contending Forces

2. The revolutionaries who seized power in Yemen have never succeeded in organizing more than a rudimentary governmental structure. Their execution of some two dozen principal supporters of the Imam destroyed much of what had passed for an administrative system, and left them with a few buildings, a telegraph system, a few million riyals in coin, and the Soviet military equipment obtained by the Imam's regime. For a time these weaknesses were offset by the popular support the revolutionaries enjoyed among urban

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elements and among the members of the long-oppressed Shafi religious sect in the coastal areas, who hoped that a new day was dawning in Yemen.

3. The prolongation of the civil war has gradually eroded the support initially enjoyed by the republicans. The regime's inability to carry out any of its promises to provide a better life has caused growing discontent. Many Shafis have come to feel that the dominance of the Zaydi religious sect is nearly as great in the present regime as it was under the Imams, and frictions between Shafis and Zaydis have weakened the YAR. The republicans have made virtually no progress in forming a reliable and effective military force, and they remain heavily dependent on Egyptian military strength. Finally, the government is virtually insolvent, and its employees often go unpaid for lack of funds. (The recently announced UAR loan of five million riyals is likely to provide a short breathing spell at best.) This atmosphere has led to an upsurge of plotting within the republican camp, as well as an attempted coup. In effect, the government's position appears to be slowly deteriorating, and a halting rather than reversal of this trend is the best the republicans can realistically hope for in the near future.

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4. The royalist forces have shown considerably more staying power than their adversaries anticipated. [REDACTED]

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young princes have taken over the leadership of the royalist forces from Imam Badr and have secured the support of sufficient numbers of tribesmen to prevent the republicans and the Egyptians from consolidating their control of the country. Though the royalists have not been able to hold any important towns against Egyptian air power and heavy weapons, they still control significant parts of the rugged countryside -- particularly in the north and northeast -- and are able to cut Egyptian supply lines and raid isolated UAR outposts.

5. The resulting stalemate presents the UAR with a serious dilemma. Nasser has committed his prestige to the success of the republicans. He has backed up this commitment with Egyptian resources and blood. Failure would be a major blow to his standing in the Arab world, and probably would cause widespread disgruntlement within Egypt. At the same time, now that the UN contingent is arriving in Yemen to oversee the disengagement agreement reached by Ambassador Bunker with the UAR and Saudi Arabia, Nasser will

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be under pressure progressively to remove the bulk of his forces from the area.*

6. When Nasser agreed to Ambassador Bunker's plan for disengagement, he probably intended to leave a security force of several thousand men under the guise of a UAR training mission. However, the failure of the UAR forces to defeat -- or even seriously weaken -- the royalist forces, combined with the feebleness of the republican regime to strengthen its position, indicates that any early withdrawal of the bulk of the UAR forces would pose serious dangers to the existence of the Yemen Arab Republic. Nasser is clearly aware of this danger, and the recent trip of Field Marshal Amer to survey the situation appears designed to determine how much, if any, reduction in UAR forces Nasser can safely make at this time.

Short-Term Outlook

7. We see little likelihood of any early break in the military stalemate. Recently the royalists have been helped by the summer rains which have hampered Egyptian air operations. While these

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royalist advances have raised royalist confidence and led to new Egyptian apprehensions, we do not believe they portend a decisive change in the conflict. UAR forces will almost certainly be able to retain control of most of the country, though some of their lines of communications will be cut periodically. The UAR forces are unlikely, however, to make much progress against the royalist tribesmen in their mountain strongholds. The UAR's pervasive presence in Yemen and its vigorous use of air power against royalist areas have resulted in strong anti-Egyptian sentiment in many areas of the country.

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On
present evidence, however, we think it unlikely that the royalist threat will be eliminated during the next several months.

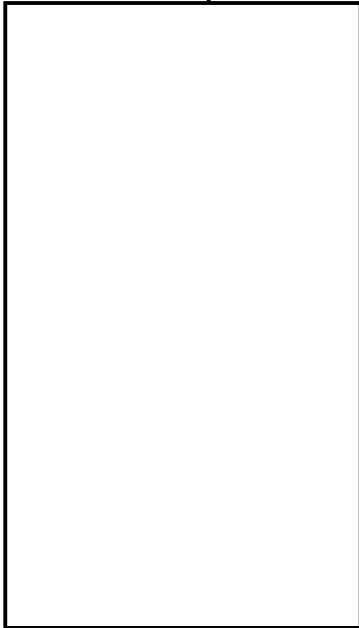
8. Under these circumstances, the Yemeni republicans will urge Nasser not to withdraw any troops. They will be fearful that any significant reductions in UAR forces will be interpreted in Yemen as a sign that Egypt is giving up the struggle. If the tribes that have been neutral or pro-republican came to believe the Egyptians were leaving the republicans on their own, many of them would almost certainly join forces with the royalists. Such a development would make it difficult for the remaining UAR forces to maintain their hold on the areas they presently control.

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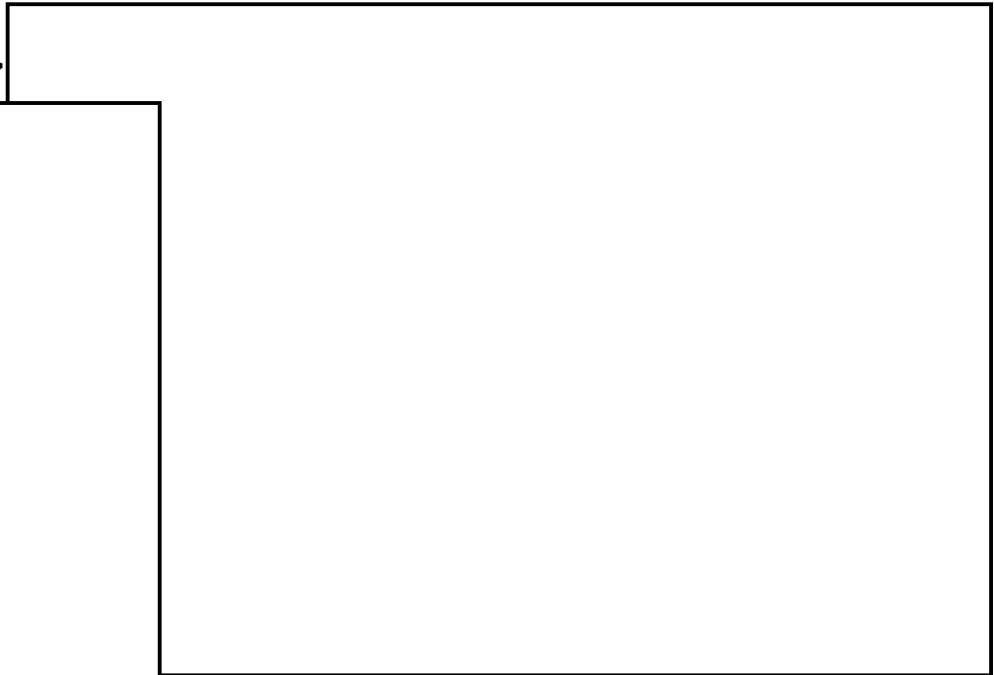
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10. Nasser is likely to proceed very slowly with any troop withdrawals he undertakes



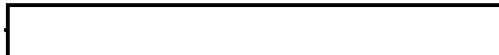
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In addition, Cairo probably will

claim that arms are still reaching the royalists under the guise of normal trade across the Saudi-Yemen border, and may argue that it has no obligation to withdraw its forces until the UN can provide firm assurances



In view of

the rugged terrain in the border area and the small size of the

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UN force, UN ability to provide assurances acceptable to Nasser is doubtful. Nevertheless, we believe Nasser is desirous of disengaging if it can be done without a republican collapse and that he will make some withdrawals -- perhaps a few thousand men -- in the next few months. It seems unlikely, however, that any larger withdrawal will take place during the next two months, the period during which Saudi Arabia and the UAR have agreed to share the costs of the UN force.

Longer-run Implications

11. If, as seems likely, the conflict continues to drag on inconclusively new dangers probably will arise.

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12. On the other hand, the UN presence may impose some restraints on the parties involved and cause them to postpone drastic action. Under such circumstances, both the Saudis and the Egyptians might feel that they could safely proceed with disengagement. However, any disengagement would proceed slowly at best, and the Egyptians would be most careful to assure that the pace and extent of their withdrawals would be matched by proof of Saudi good faith and would not endanger the continued existence of the republican regime.

13. Continued hostilities would improve Soviet opportunities to increase their recent gains in Yemen. The USSR has extended both military and economic aid to Yemen, and there are now about 1,000 Soviet technicians in the country. Most of these are working on the construction of a major airfield near Sana, which the Yemenis will be unable to operate. Were the Soviets to obtain relatively unrestricted use of the airfield, it would facilitate Moscow's efforts to establish civil air links with African countries. As the size of the Soviet assistance program has grown in recent months, Yemen's attitude toward the USSR has become increasingly favorable. At the same time, there has been growing suspicion of the US, and Yemeni officials have

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placed numerous obstacles in the path of the US aid mission. While the republicans will still look primarily to the UAR for inspiration and assistance, their growing sense of frustration as the conflict drags on probably will make them increasingly receptive to any plausible Soviet offers of assistance.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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